DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 236 497 CG 017 047

AUTHOR McNeer, Ann; And Others
TITLE Developmental Discontinuities in Women's Role Model Choice.
PUB DATE May 83
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association (55th, Chicago, IL, May 5-7, 1983).
PUB TYPE Reports - Research/Technical (143) -- Speeches/Conference Papers (150) -- Tests/Evaluation Instruments (160)

EDRS PRICE MF01 Plus Postage. PC Not Available from EDRS.
DESCRIPTORS Achievement Need; Attitude Measures; College Students; *Females; Higher Education; Identification (Psychology); *Individual Development; *Personality Traits; *Role Models; *Sex Role; Success

ABSTRACT

The importance of role models for women achieving career success has received increased attention; however, there has been little agreement on a definition of the concept. To determine who college women say their role models are and to determine developmental discontinuities in women's reports of their role models, 377 college women completed two open-ended questionnaires. Analyses of results showed that women's role model choices could be coded into 18 categories. Women predominantly named cross-sex relatives, instructors, and professionals as their role models and models they would like to have in the future. More male models were named when women described themselves currently, rather than when they were younger. Personality characteristics used to describe role models were "masculine" in nature, centering around traits of competence, intelligence, and ambition. Women reported that gender was not an important characteristic of role models. Although they said they could live without a same-sex role model, many women reported that they would like a female role model, especially to help them in their personal versus professional career decisions. (JAC)

**********
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
**********

HARD COPY NOT AVAILABLE

ED236497

# Developmental Discontinuities in Women's Role Model Choice

Ann McNeer, Brian Hayes, and Michele A. Paludi

Kent State University

Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association, Chicago, May, 1983

CG 017047

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.

☐ Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

• Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL IN MICROFICHE ONLY HAS BEEN GRANTED BY

Michele A. Paludi

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

A considerable amount of evaluation and controversy has been devoted to women's achievement motivation. For example, research has generally indicated that women do not attain levels of success frequently attained by men. In addition, traditional measures of achievement motivation and behavior are unrelated for women. Furthermore, women rarely enter male-dominated occupations. Several explanations have been offered to explain these common results: women's fear of success, women's external attributions for success, and institutional discrimination against women.

The importance of role models for women achieving career success has recently been receiving increased attention in the literature. Arguments in favor of female role models for women have emphasized the importance of women's identification with female models, the importance of the information provided by the model's behavior, and also positive incentive through illustrative success. Unfortunately, there has been little agreement to date as to how to define a role model. For example, Douvan (1976) stressed the importance of a role model defining possibilities of what an individual can accomplish. Basow and Howe (1980) suggested that a role model is "someone whose life and activities influenced the respondent in specific life decisions." Goldstein (1979) suggested that sustained, intense interaction with a role model is necessary, while Plost and Rosen (1974) concluded that mere visual exposure to an individual (e.g., via television) is

sufficient for that person to serve as a role model. Furthermore, several investigators (e.g., Almquist & Angrist, 1971; Goldstein, 1979) have assumed women's role models are their mothers and/or female teachers.

Instead of beginning with the premise that mothers and female-teachers function as role models for women, we decided to ascertain who college women say their role models are -- identifying desirable personality characteristics which might qualify someone to be a role model. In addition, we wanted to determine developmental discontinuities in women's reports of their role models.

## Procedure

Three hundred seventy-seven female introductory psychology students (mean age = 20.4 years) were asked to complete two questionnaires. The first questionnaire (adapted from Gaeddert, Kahn, Frevert, & Shirley, Note 1) consisted of the following questions to be answered in an open-ended fashion:

DURING ELEMENTARY SCHOOL, WHO WERE THE PEOPLE (OR PERSON) YOU WOULD MOST LIKED TO HAVE BEEN LIKE? THAT IS, WHO WERE THE PEOPLE YOU TRIED TO MODEL YOURSELF AFTER? IF THERE WAS NO SUCH PERSON, WRITE "NO ONE."

DURING JUNIOR HIGH, WHO WERE THE PEOPLE (OR PERSON) YOU WOULD HAVE MOST LIKED TO HAVE BEEN LIKE? THAT IS, WHO WERE THE PEOPLE YOU TRIED TO MODEL YOURSELF AFTER? IF THERE WAS NO SUCH PERSON, WRITE "NO ONE."

DURING HIGH SCHOOL, WHO WERE THE PEOPLE (OR PERSON) YOU WOULD HAVE MOST LIKED TO HAVE BEEN LIKE? THAT IS, WHO WERE THE PEOPLE YOU TRIED TO MODEL YOURSELF AFTER? IF THERE WAS NO SUCH PERSON, WRITE "NO ONE."

AT THE PRESENT TIME, WHO ARE THE PEOPLE (OR PERSON) YOU WOULD LIKE TO BE LIKE? THAT IS, WHO ARE THE PEOPLE YOU TRY TO MODEL YOURSELF AFTER? IF THERE IS NO SUCH PERSON, WRITE "NO ONE."

The second questionnaire included the following items:

1. Describe 5 role models or mentors whom you have used in elaborating your identity -- for example your mother, father, sister, brother, friend, movie star, etc. List 10 characteristics of each model that you like.

| | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Role Model | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ | _____ |

Characteristics

1.

2.

3.

4.

5.

6.

7.

8.

9.

10.

2. Who are some role models you might choose in the future? Explain your answer.

3. It is important to recognize when sex (male/female) is an important characteristic of our role models. Is whether the person is male or female an important characteristic of your role models? Explain your answer.

4. Could you live without a role model of your own sex. Explain your answer.

## Categorizing Responses

Women's role model choices could be coded into 18 categories.

Female Relative (a specific female relative who was named, e.g., my mother; my aunt Esther)

Female Instructor (e.g., my second grade teacher, Mrs. St. Clair)

Female Celebrity (e.g., Jackie Onassis, Cheryl Tiegs)

Female in Field of Study Desired by Subject (e.g., my nursing supervisor)

Female Friend (e.g., my friend Sarah who lives in my dorm)

Male Relative (e.g., my father, my brother John)

Male Instructor (e.g., my high school English teacher, Mr. Vancourt)

Male Celebrity (e.g., John Wayne, Vincent VanGogh

Male in Field of Study Desired by Subject (e.g., my band director, Mr. Owens)

Male Friend (e.g., Richard, my chemistry lab partner)

Blank (i.e., item-left unanswered by subject)

No one (i.e., subject indicated she had no role models)

Self (i.e., subject indicated she was her only role model)

Vague Referent (e.g., Susie, Mrs. David -- no identification (e.g., teacher, sister, model) was given)

Religious Person Identified (e.g., my pastor, Reverend Michaels, Sister Phyllis -- the Mother Superior at my elementary school)

Religious Person Unidentified (e.g., nun, priest, rabbi)

Feminine Personality Characteristics (No person was named, but feminime personality traits were indicated (cf. Broverman, et al., 1970; Spence & Helmreich, 1978), e.g., "I would like to be a warm and loving person.")

Masculine Personality Characteristics (e.g., "I want to be important and work on my own -- independent.")

If a woman listed more than one role model, each model was recorded. Since the statistical analyses of these data required independent observations, only the first role model listed by these women were used in the data analysis. The following categories were not sufficiently endorsed to be included in the analyses: No One, Self, Blank, Male Celebrity, Female in Field of Study Desired by Subject, Religious Person Identified, Religious Person Unidentified.

Each woman's responses were independently categorized by two of the authors.

## Results

For the chi-square analyses of independence performed on data from the first questionnaire, age was defined as childhood (elementary school), early adolescence (junior high school), later adolescence (high school) and early adulthood (present time -- college). Role model choice was expressed as one of the categories described above.

Analyses from both questionnaires resulted in the following main findings:

1. Women predominantly named cross-sex relatives, instructors and professionals as their role models and models they would like to have in the future.

2. Role model choice varied as a function of age: more male models were named when women described themselves presently (high school and college years) than when they were younger (elementary and junior high school).

3. Personality characteristics used to describe role models were "masculine" in nature, centering around traits of competence, intelligence, and ambition.

4. Women reported that gender is not an important characteristic of role models and that they could live without a role model of their same sex. However, many women reported that they would like to have a female role model, especially to help them in their personal vs. professional career decisions.

## Conclusions and Implications

The technique for determining women's role models differed in the present study from previous research. Instead of designating females as women's role models, we defined a role model as someone a woman conceptualizes and chooses. In comparison with previous research, the present study revealed that women's role model choices are more variable. Women did mention mothers and female teachers as role models. But women also listed ministers, politicians, friends, movie stars, and classmates. Women also selected men as role models and listed masculine personality characteristics as ones they emulated. These findings are not surprising, given the higher status of males in our culture and their greater visibility in academia and in the media.

We are currently extending our methodology in several ways. First, we want to study developmental discontinuities in men's role models. Do men's role models change as a function of age, or are their choices relatively stable? We predict that the content will change as a function of age, but not the category itself. For example, young boys may select a cast member from the Dukes of Hazard while older men may select Paul Newman or Robert Redford.

Second, we want to obtain data on men and women's achievement behavior or achievement goals. Are cross-sex models as effective as same-sex models? Are female Ph.D.'s who had a female major professor whom they considered a role model more productive than those who had male major professors? Similarly, are male Ph.D.'s

who had a female major professor as a role model less productive than those who had a male major professor?

We plan to replicate this research for several time periods. This would be useful in documenting historical trends.

Finally, we would like to determine whether mentoring is a mutually recognized reciprocal relationship. We plan to focus on the relationship from both the mentor's and mentee's viewpoint.

## Reference Note

[1] Gaeddert, W.P., Kahn, A., Frevert, R.C., & Shirley, R. Role model choice: Who do women say their models are? Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Midwestern Psychological Association, St. Louis, May, 1981.

## References


Almquist, E.M., & Angrist, S.S. Role model influences on college women's career aspirations. Merrill-Palmer Quarterly, 1971, 17, 263-279.

Basow, S.A., & Howe, K.G. Role-model influence: Effects of sex and sex-role attitude in college students. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 1980, 4, 558-572.

Douvan, E. The role of models in women's professional development. Psychology of Women Quarterly, 1976, 1, 5-20.

Goldstein, E. Effect of same-sex and cross-sex role models on the subsequent academic productivity of scholars. American Psychologist, 1979, 34, 407-410.

Ploct, M. & Rosen, M.J. Effect of sex of career models on occupational preferences of adolescents. A.V. Communication Review, 1974, 22, 41-50.